AMONG THE MUMMERS

BY ALAN DALE

TERESA VAUGHN AS THE SOUBRETTE & NEWS GIRL

STUART ROBSON IN MRS. PONDERBURY'S PAST

VIOLA ALLEN

A JAPANESE DOLL

NEW YORK turned up its disdainful nose at the sole theatrical offering of the past week, to wit, "The School Girl," at the Bijou Theatre. While in this particular case I can't blame the metropolis for the retrousse condition of its nasal appendage, I think that the time has come when New Yorkers should awaken to the fact that they have been hopelessly spoiled. Managers may well sigh. Prophets can be forgiven for despondency. The truth is that the people of this little Manhattan Island have been licking up the theatrical cream of the civilized world, and smacking their lips thanklessly, like pampered cats. London and Paris have simply been existing for the benefit of New York. Every novelty, every successful star, every pedestalled actor and actress have been snapped up this season by our marvellously enterprising managers for this fastidious little strip of land known as New York City. Money has been no object, and when this season closes some time in May, Americans may console themselves with the thought that they have enjoyed the dramatic luxuries of the earth. The mountain came to Mahomet, for Mahomet couldn't be bothered travelling to the mountain.

We have had Sir Henry Irving and his London Lyceum Company, with all the successful plays that have resulted from years of research and from colossal expenditure. Irving left the English metropolis, where his unique position is a matter of history, and came to America, because this country is livelier, more appreciative, and more theatrically disposed than England. John Hare and his Garrick Theatre organization are at Abbey's, with plays that have been carefully selected and conscientiously presented. Sarah Bernhardt, the idol of France, the one French actress who can pack any playhouse in London, will be with us before January has merged into February, and she will bring with her a repertoire made up the very latest features. Duse, perhaps the most remarkable woman of the decade, will forsake England, Germany, Italy and Austria very shortly just to cater to these insatiable Manhattan Islanders.

Hammerstein has given us Yvette Guilbert not because she was artistically wonderful, but because she costs a great deal, and therefore Americans must have her. As for the new and creamy plays lavished upon New York, they are almost too numerous to mention. "Trilby" was given to New York before London got it, although Du Maurier is a London resident, better known abroad than he is here. "The Prisoner of Zenda" was presented in this city long before the Londoners got even a whiff of it, although Anthony Hope is a London favorite, and Edward Rose distinctly an Englishman. At the Empire Theatre very shortly we shall have a new play by the much discussed Henry Arthur Jones, and for the sake of flattering the judgment of our spoiled children, it will be produced here at the same time that it is given in London. New Yorkers would be insulted if they were asked to wait for Mr. Jones's effusion. "We are quite as good as the Londoners," they would say, "and if Jones doesn't believe in our judgment, kindly allow us to get along without him. Pinero's two last plays, "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" and "The Benefit of the Doubt," have both come to America, the former with Hare, and the latter to the Lyceum Theatre, where it opens Monday night.

As for the opera—well, at the present time Europe is famining, for everybody is over here—the De Reszke brothers, Melba, Calve, Maurel, Plancon, Bevignani and Nordica. It is a veritable embarrass de richesses. There is no need to go abroad. You can educate yourself operatically, dramatically, comic operatically and burlesque-tcally right here in this little town near Yonkers.

"The Shop Girl," "His Excellency," "The Artist's Model," "The Chieftain" have all been vouchsafed to New Yorkers. We are spoiled children. If we clamored for the moon (because somebody else happened to be clamoring for it) Charles Frohman would at once enter into negotiations with its Man, and Messrs. Abbey, Schoeffel & Grau, Daniel Frohman, A. M. Palmer and Oscar Hammerstein—with possibly Proctor, Keith and Koster & Bial—would enter into the competition.

We should get the moon, if London had to use candles and Paris had to rely upon its electric light.

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And yet sleek gentlemen of the Richard Watson Gilder type talk of the "fatuous and destructive policy of cheap and coarse sensationalism" and other tirades against the ignorance and incapacity of our managers. Of course, these human flecks on the metropolitan sunshine must have something to talk about, and they may as well vent their spleen upon the theatres as upon the streets, the elevated railways and the street cars. They do absolutely no harm. In fact, they really do good, because they make us laugh, and laughter is the greatest crime-preventive in the world. As Carlyle says: "A man who has once laughed heartily can never be thoroughly bad. If Irving, and Duse, and Bernhardt, and Hare, and Pinero, and Henry Arthur Jones, and Sydney Grundy are cheaply and coarsely sensational—well, let's be cheap and coarse and enjoy ourselves.

The overwhelming invasion of foreign talent that this season has given us is causing our managers to wonder what is to become of the season that is as yet unborn. The world is being scoured for next year. Resultlessly so far. No foreign star is booked with the exception of Willard, and he will not dare to show his nose here again unless he has new plays to offer. American playwrights will be in great demand, and American actors and actresses will have better chances than they have ever had. But they must remember that, as I said before, New Yorkers have been hopelessly spoiled. Mediocrity hasn't the ghost of a show in this metropolis. New Yorkers will have nothing but the best. Companies must be made up exclusively of good actors; productions must be staged handsomely and artistically, and entertainments must be sincere and marrow-permeating. You can't get away from those facts.

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What on earth could have induced Minnie Palmer to bring "The School Girl" to New York? Miss Palmer cannot positively have forgotten the tastes of her countrymen, and she surely did them—and, incidentally, herself—a grievous wrong when she inflicted this tissue of rubbish upon them at the Bijou Theatre last Monday night. Musical comedy must be bright and rollicking in order to possess a raison d'etre. Dreary horseplay can no longer pass muster in this city. A few years ago "The School Girl" would have been quite possible in this city, but in our old age we need something more. We are tending ever onward. The boy who stood on the burning deck is not "in it" with us.

Miss Palmer herself belongs to the school of hoydens. These ladies have made their fortunes and have retired. Lotta grew rich playing practical jokes and frisking about in short petticoats. Maggie Mitchell became wealthy impersonating infants with light mentalities. Miss Palmer still pegs away at the ungrateful stories that Lotta and Miss Mitchell did to death. If she isn't rich at the present time, I muchly fear me that she never will be. At any rate, "The School Girl" will not add to her bank account. Yet Minnie Palmer, properly placed, might be acceptable. There are a great many things that she can do, and do very well. She needs long skirts, for she's a big girl now, and she should eschew grimaces and baby mannerisms. We can't stand them. We want our actresses, who play sixteen-year-old girls, to look—for the sake of the illusion—not more than thirty. We draw the line at thirty. Beyond thirty, we wont budge, for that limit is certainly a concession.

Some of Miss Palmer's specialties might go very well as a "turn" at the music halls. Ten minutes of her at Koster & Bial's would be advantageous, and a five minutes' glimpse at Olympia wouldn't be bad. She cannot, however, furnish an evening's entertainment in New York City, and that is putting the case as kindly as possible.

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Olga's kiss has extended its engagement at the Empire Theatre. I thought that this would be the case. The pity of it is that this version of "Carmen" was not produced when the rampageous Nethersole began her New York engagement. "Denise" was pretty nearly a failure, for Miss Nethersole is not happy when she has to wear a black dress, and look wronged. She is far too energetic for that. You can understand her wronging, as she does in "Carmen," for she is a lady who must take the initiative, and in "Carmen" it is Don Jose who wears the black dress.

Miss Nethersole's tactics will change henceforth. Instead of impersonating betrayed ladies, she will interpret betraying ladies. An actress with Olga's kissitiveness cannot expect the public to accept her as a victim of man's perfidy. She will be a living exponent of the wrongs that women do. Men will adore her, for she will show as no actress has ever shown before—how helpless, how clay-like is the poor, abused biped man, in the presence of a fascinating lady with a portentous kiss.

The world has waited for Olga Nethersole in this role, and I am heartily glad that she has a week longer at the Empire. Men who go to see her will understand the world far better. They will be fitter jurors. They wont believe the cock-and-bull stories told by distressed damsels quite so readily. They will want to examine their kisses; to mark these kisses as exhibits so-and-so. Miss Nethersole's kisses should find their way into all scientific works on jurisprudence, for they throw a new light upon an old subject. Every lawyer with a breach of promise case on hand should see Nethersole. Barbara Aub wouldn't have had a leg to stand upon if the counsel for the defence had produced one of her kisses in court, for inspection, and it had proved to be Nethersolian.

The success of "Carmen" has had its funny side. The people from the Metropolitan Opera House have rushed to see the adaptation. Melba, who doesn't waste much time on Calve, spent an evening with Nethersole. Maurice Grau, jealous of his operatic star, has made a careful study of Nethersole, just as Daniel Frohman did of Calve. He studies best who studies last, however. Daniel Frohman studied last.

This adaptation may result in a number of new music-less versions of operas. There's an actor named Lewis Morrison who makes "barrels of money" in the small towns of the country with a version of "Faust." "Books of the opera" can be bought anywhere for the chaste sum of fifteen cents, and the germs of a possibility lurk in each one.

I heard a wag at the Metropolitan the other night remark between the acts of "Romeo et Juliette": "Say, they have made a pretty good play of 'Carmen.' It seems to me that a pretty, interesting drama might be made of this 'Romeo and Juliette' opera. It's worth trying at any rate."

Herbert Kelcey has been studying "Carmen" a great deal during the past week. He is very devoted to art—with a capital "A"—is Herbert. Oh, yes, I know what you suspect, of course. You imagine that he goes to the Empire because Effie Shannon is in the cast. I don't believe it. Miss Shannon plays such a small part that no actor of Kelcey's reputation could possibly hope to glean any points from it. I have heard Kelcey's perpetual presence at the Empire accounted for by a fear that Miss Shannon, coming in contact with Miss Nethersole, might catch fire and burn up. I decline to credit this. Mr. Kelcey intends to star next season, and his object is to gain an insight into the peculiarities that make starring successful.

This actor knows full well that while trousers go very well in New York, they will be perfectly useless on the road. Kelcey's dazzling repertoire of trousers has held him tightly in metropolitan esteem for years. Without trousers—that is to say, without his repertoire of trousers—Kelcey could never have weathered so many keen theatrical seasons at the Lyceum Theatre. New Yorkers are the easiest and the hardest people on earth to please. For all we know, Kelcey is contemplating a little kiss of his own, adapted from Olga's. There will be many of these adaptations on the market before long. Why shouldn't Kelcey get the first?

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Sir 'Gus 'Arris has forgiven us for all the little flippancies we hurled at his "dress suit." He bears no malice. It would take a great deal more than a few diaphanous levities levelled at an evil white waistcoat to keep the knightly Augustus away from America. Sir 'Gus refuses to be snubbed, for he sees George Edwards's companies making considerable money in America.

There is a good deal of truth in this. In America a playwright lives by his last work. If Bronson Howard had produced the extensively promised play that he was to have done at the Empire, and that play had failed, people would have forgotten "Shenandoah" and his other successes. They would have tacked the failure to his name, and he would have lived branded until he achieved another success.

The failure of "A Stag Party," however, was enough to frighten any fellow. The man doesn't live who could be bought to father it. The failure doesn't matter very much to Bill Nye, for he can appeal to thousands of people who are not patrons of the playhouses. Potter is a sensitive person, anyway. My own idea is that he has gone abroad because he has exhausted the resources of the Astor Library. There is nothing left for him now but the British Museum, and he may stay in London for many years before he comes to the end of his tether there.

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The lot of the dramatic critic during this first of the New Year's weeks will not be precisely a happy one. Two or three times in a season it seems as though every manager was bent on making a "splurge" simultaneously. This will be one of those times. Many a critic will quail at the work that is before him. I'm one of the fortunate fellows, for I'm never thoroughly happy unless I can sniff a playhouse. The more the merrier, as far as I am concerned. I can't understand a man growing blase of the theatre. I'm satisfied with either a very good play or a very bad one. I don't know which I enjoy the more. It is the hopeless mediocrities that ruffle my serenity.

At the Lyceum Theatre we shall have "The Benefit of the Doubt," by Pinero, who has ceased to worry himself about sociological problems that he doesn't understand, and that we don't want him to understand. At Daly's Theatre we are to have an adaptation from the German called "The Two Escutcheons," with the still fascinating Ada Rehan in the cast. Two doses of "Gentleman Joe" are promised—one at the Bijou and one at the Fifth Avenue, and neither with Arthur Roberts, who made the piece successful in London, in the cast.

The titled manager has just cabled to this country that his Drury Lane pantomime, "Cinderella," has made a colossal success in London, and he wants to bring it to America next season. It is about the only English attraction we may get next season—for reasons that I pointed out above—and we may not even secure this, for Sir 'Gus is rather afraid that we have no theatre large enough to accommodate it. You see, the Metropolitan Opera House is a very wee place; the Academy of Music is extremely cramped up, and Hammerstein's Olympia is conspicuously tiny.

The trouble is that Sir 'Gus wants to come over himself with his pantomime. While we could house nearly any English pantomime ever produced, it is quite another thing to shelter the production plus Sir 'Gus. You see, the manager probably blames the failure of "Hansel and Gretel" at Daly's Theatre to the fact that the acoustic properties of that house were such that the perplexing little speech, in which he murdered Victoria's ideas, was carried into every nook and cranny of the theatre. What Sir 'Gus needs is a house so large that his curtain lecture cannot possibly fill it. Sir 'Gus talks to the uneducated few, not to the educated many, and the acoustics of the theatre he patronizes must be arranged with that end in view.

The manager must speak. He cannot and he will not deny himself that luxury. It is the only recreation that he has, and it is our duty to tolerate it—even if we suffer.

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Before he sailed for England Paul Potter explained his temporary desertion of this kindly land very pleasantly.

"If I stayed in New York," he said, "I should be known as the author of 'A Stag Party.' When I settle in London the English people will speak of me as the adapter of 'Trilby.' I prefer that reputation."

Then there's "A Black Sheep" at Hoyt's Theatre, by the author of "A Rag Baby," "A Bunch of Keys," "A Hole in the Ground," "A Milk White Flag," "A Temperance Town," "A Trip to Chinatown," "A Brass Monkey," "A Texas Steer," "A Midnight Bell," and one or two other masterpieces. Mr. Hoyt hasn't been heard from since he gave us that jolly little funeral play filled with glistening jokes about undertakers, and corpses, and ice, and mourning garbs. At the Garrick Theatre Stuart Robson will introduce us to "Mrs. Ponderbury's Past," after Cissy's wink and the fragments thereof have been swept away, and at the Columbus Theatre there will be a melodrama called "Saved from the Sea."

John Hare will change his bill and put "Mrs. Ebbsmith" on the shelf in favor of "A Pair of Spectacles," in which we saw Stoddart. Hare is a plucky fellow, for to court comparison with Stoddart is rather a dangerous affair. Still, there will be so many other things in town that I don't believe Mr. Hare will be badly singed, even if his "conception of the part" proves to be no improvement upon that of Stoddart.

Take it all in all, the week will be a fine and a breezy one. The magazine folks will be able to write some more merry articles about "the fatuous and destructive policy of cheap and coarse sensationalism," with Hare as the Cheap and Pinero as the Coarse.

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May Irwin's coming back to New York in February. May I chuckle? I know that it is very vulgar of me to even chronicle the return of this fat and dimpled lady, who never allows you to think, and who, in fact, draws all the thinkers away from the thinking places. I feel that if I really did my duty I should preach a sermon about the debasing influence of these variety shows, their demoralizing effect upon the drab matter of the brain, and the fatuousness and destructiveness of the managerial policy that makes them possible.

Miss Irwin, however, is irresistible. Nobody loathes farce-comedy more than I do, nobody has tried harder to write it down—and we have really been very free from it—but in Miss Irwin's case you forget the McNally of the affair in the charms of the woman herself. She comes to the Bijou, and they say that she has something new up her sleeves. As those sartorial effects are extremely large, she has room there for plenty of novelty. She is a dangerous woman, of course, because she takes you away from dutiful and beautiful entertainments, but occasionally a magnetic influence is desirable. "Yours not to reason why" is a condition that does no harm at all, once in a blue moon. Miss Irwin's smile is quite as unique in its way as Cissy's wink or Olga's kiss, and there is always room for it in this city. In fact, it is wasted "on the road."

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Sarah Bernhardt will be with us again before we know where we are, with her incessantly golden locks, her delightful and quivering emaciation, and the dear, cherished remarks that we love so well. "Ah!" she will say to the twelve gentlemen who call upon her for interviews. "What can I tell you? Ma foi! I love America, and I am so, so, so glad to be back in dear New York. Mes amis, I scarcely live when I'm away from New York. Such audiences! Such intelligence! Such appreciation! Sapristi! Il n'y a que New York. Je voudrais bien mourir ici. London is nice, but it is cold. Paris is pretty, but what are the Champs Elysees to Fifth avenue, and who would dare to compare the Rue de Rivoli with Twenty-third street? I am chez moi in New York. I am myself. All that is best in me exudes from my pores as I face an American audience. Je vous aime tous."

Sarah always says something of that sort, and it always "goes." The very latest wrinkle is for actresses to wish they had been born in every successive town they visit. Rhea recently told the inhabitants of Seattle that her one regret was that she hadn't first seen the light of day there! Mrs. Kendal wept in Birmingham a few weeks ago because her cradle hadn't rocked there. Irving has never yet played in a town that he didn't covet for native purposes. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Sarah told us this time that she could never forgive her mother for not having accomplished her maternity in South Fifth avenue or Bleecker street. Bernhardt never naps. She is always "all there."

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When you read about the lack of morality among the people of the stage, don't you believe it. It isn't true, and an occurrence of which I have just heard will substantiate that statement. Miss Fanny Davenport's company was playing in Providence the other day. Miss Davenport, as you all know, is exceedingly straitlaced. It was, in fact, the piety of her organization that prevented us from seeing anything improper in "Gismonda." Well, a young actor in her company happened to wax rather jovial at the hotel where he stopped. He was noisy, and they say that in his room he—well, never mind about that part of the story. He didn't behave himself very nicely, and that is all I can say. An actor from another company was at the same hotel, and he heard the festivities in the room of his colleague. They prevented his sleeping, and he was tired. So he wrote to Miss Davenport and told her that she was giving employment to a very dangerous and improper young man.

The next day the demonstrative actor got his "notice," with a line to the effect that he was no longer fit for Miss Davenport's company, as his morals were not up to the standard. I am pleased to chronicle this fact, because it shows that there is one company that has put itself irrevocably on record as being distinctly pure and godly. Next season it is probable that no actor or actress who cannot produce a certificate of unblemished character will be engaged by Miss Davenport, and I may add that she has ordered no play from Sardou, so that even in her productions she will be free from Gallic taint.

This is something that is bound to evoke legitimate pride among American theatregoers. Innate loveliness has been Mrs. Kendal's stock 'n trade for years, and I don't blame Miss Davenport for emulating her example. I really don't. These uproarious actors should be squelched, and it is reserved for actresses like Miss Davenport, teeming with pluck and enthusiasm, to squelch them. The "perfesh" has been suffering beneath a disreputable stigma too long.

ALAN DALE.